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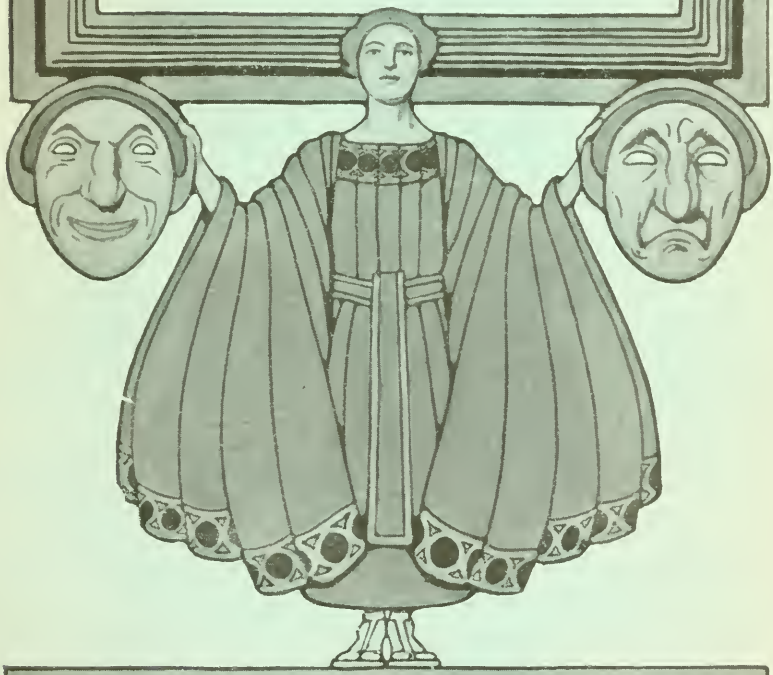
Uncertain Silas

H. P. Powell



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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Uncertain Silas

A Rural Comedy in One Act

By

H. P. POWELL
Author of "You're It," etc.

PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1918

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MAY 23 1918

Uncertain Silas

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AUG 1

Uncertain Silas

CHARACTERS

SILAS SORGHUM, *a rustic swain, whose affections are firmly glued to* —

SUSAN SWEET, *whose star is momentarily eclipsed by* —

YSOBEL LE CLAIR, *a stylish and very transient summer boarder of* —

MA SWEET, *Susan's mother, who gives Cupid what help he needs.*

TIME OF PLAYING.—Twenty-five minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Silas Sorghum is sure he loves Susan better than anything in the world, and Susan believes that "no knife can cut our love in two." But Ma Sweet has her opinion of Silas. "'Tain't knives that cut love—it's another woman." When the new summer boarder, Ysobel Le Clair, arrives Silas is swept off his feet. He agrees to take her riding in his automobile. "I hate to take Susan's beau, but I've got to get something for my money." While Ysobel is dressing, Silas falls asleep, and Ma Sweet dusts his face and feet with flour. Ysobel is frightened. "Don't you dare touch me, you country bumpkin." Silas' eyes are opened. "I mistrusted her from the first. Let's get married, Susan."

COSTUMES, ETC.

Silas. About twenty-five. At first entrance wears overalls, cotton shirt, heavy shoes or high boots, straw hat, and carries pitchfork. Quick change to a "store suit," a little small for him, celluloid collar, patent four-in-hand of some bright color, put on crooked, tan derby hat, a little small, and tan shoes, also too small.

Susan. About twenty. Calico or simple white dress, with apron. She should be pretty, but "countrified" in costume and manner.

Ma Sweet. About fifty. A brisk, determined woman, used to bossing men. Wears calico working dress and apron. Sleeves rolled up. Wears spectacles. Hair iron gray.

Ysobel Le Claire. About twenty-five. A typical smartly dressed city shop girl. She wears hat and white summer dress on first entrance, gloves, parasol, etc., and carries suit-case. At second entrance wears motor hat and coat.

PROPERTIES

For Silas. Pitchfork.

For Susan. Broom.

For Ysobel. Suit-case.

For Ma Sweet. Pan of peeled potatoes; knife; sifter with a little flour.

SCENE PLOT

This play may have either an interior or an exterior setting, as follows:

If Interior. Scene.—Sitting-room of Ma Sweet's house. Door up c. leads to porch. Door l. leads to bedrooms. Door r. leads to kitchen. Windows also at back if desired. Couch up r. Chair down r. Table and chairs down l. Other furnishings to make a comfortable country room. The directions in the play for exits and entrances are arranged for this interior setting. With very slight changes, however, they will serve equally well for the exterior setting.

Exterior Setting. Scene.—Back porch and yard of Ma Sweet's house. Porch and entrance to house at l. Fence at back and gate up c. A hammock or rather couch up r. Rustic bench or chair down r. Bench with pail and dipper down l. Yard has plants, rose-bushes, etc.

Uncertain Silas

SCENE.—Ma Sweet's *sitting-room (or yard. See Scene Plot, page 5). Entrances* R., L., *and* C.

(Susan *discovered sweeping at* L. *and humming to herself.* Silas *enters,* C., *with pitchfork over his shoulder.*)

Silas. 'Lo, Susan!

Susan. How be you, Silas?

(*Goes on sweeping, trying to hide embarrassment.*)

Silas. I'm right peart, I reckon. How be you?

(*Comes to her.*)

Susan. I'm tol'able, I thank you—how be you?—oh, I asked you that already, didn't I?

(Susan *comes down* L. C. Silas *follows. She looks up at* Silas *shyly. He is equally embarrassed, and they both switch themselves coyly. Their fingers meet and intertwine, whereupon their embarrassment increases.*)

Silas. Oh, Susan?

Susan. What is it, Silas?

Silas. Do you—do you—like me?

Susan. Indeed I do, Silas. (*Painful pause.*) Do you—do you—like me?

Silas (*emphatically*). You betchuh! (*Another embarrassed silence ensues; this time* Silas' *arm finds its way round* Susan's *waist and her head nestles on his shoulder. He still holds fork and she holds broom.*) Oh, Susan?

SUSAN. What is it, Silas?

SILAS. Do you—do you—do—you—love me?

SUSAN (*very softly*). Yes, Silas. Do you—do you—do—you—love me?

SILAS (*emphatically*). You betchuh!

(*More silence.* SILAS *drops pitchfork and his other arm goes around* SUSAN'S *waist. She drops her broom. Her arm steals around his neck and their lips meet.* MA SWEET *enters from door* R. *and surveys them sourly.*)

MA (*thunderingly*). Silas Sorghum, you quit wrasslin' with my daughter. (*In consternation,* SILAS *and* SUSAN *break away.* SUSAN *gets her broom and starts sweeping furiously but aimlessly, down* R., *and* SILAS *trips and sits down on the pitchfork, arising hurriedly, and going* L. MA *comes* C. *and regards him sternly.*) You rain-ruined stack of alfalfa! Whadda ye mean coming and taking my daughter's mind off'n her chores with your gum-rubbin', jiu jitsu exercises?

SILAS (*abashed*). Yes'm!

MA (*to* SUSAN). Ain't you got no more pride than to let this imitation of a worm do his wrigglin' around you? Where's your suffragette blood, anyways?

SUSAN (*staunchly*). I ain't got no suffragette blood, and Silas ain't no worm, and I love him and he loves me better'n anything in the world, don't you, Si?

SILAS. You betchuh!

MA (*mocking*). You betchuh! Rats—you're just as bad as any of them. You change girls oftener than you change socks.

SILAS. 'Tain't so; I change socks every month.

SUSAN. Si says "no knife can cut our love in two."

MA. 'Tain't knives these days that cuts love into hash; it's some other woman.

SILAS. There's no other woman can win me.

(*Goes up* C.)

MA. The measliest vampire going wouldn't waste the effort. (*Comes down* L.)

SUSAN. Aw, Ma, don't be so hard on poor Si. When is the new summer boarder coming?

MA. She ought to be here now. I heard the train blowing ten minutes ago.

SILAS (*looking off at* C.). Gee whilliker—smithereens, looka the peach!

(*Enter* YSOBEL, C., *carrying suit-case.*)

YSOBEL. I really beg your pardon. I'm looking for Mrs. Sweet.

MA. Well, you're looking in the right direction. I'm her.

YSOBEL (*coming down* L. *and extending her hand*). I am Ysobel Le Clair.

(MA *shakes hands.*)

MA. This is my daughter, Susan.

YSOBEL. I'm so delighted.

SUSAN. Pleased to meetchu.

(MA *makes no move to introduce* SILAS, *up* R. C., *who is staring open-mouthed.*)

YSOBEL. Is this your husband?

MA. Lord, no. That's something the cat brought in.

SUSAN. Now, Ma. (*To* YSOBEL.) This is my friend, Silas Sorghum.

(SILAS *bows awkwardly and approaches* YSOBEL.)

YSOBEL (*up* L. C.). Oh, I am so glad to know you, Mr. Sorghum.

(*She drops suit-case and holds* SILAS' *hands.*)

SILAS (*innocently*). Be ye, honest?

YSOBEL (*with mock seriousness*). Oh, if you could but read my poor heart.

(*She looks so soulfully into* SILAS' *eyes that he is hypnotically drawn to her, and his lips are seriously near her own, when she flirts her head away, snatches up her suit-case and exit through door,* L., *laughing.*)

SILAS (*drawing deep breath*). Pore little woman!

(*He goes* L. *and stares through the door dreamily.*)

MA (*scornfully*). No knife can cut our love in two, but, oh you summer boarder!

(*Goes* R. *and exit. If the setting is exterior this exit is at* L., *into house.* SUSAN *goes up* R. *to couch and weeps softly. After a bit,* SILAS *turns and discovers her.*)

SILAS. Why, Susan! What'n the world's the matter?

SUSAN. N-n-n-nothing.

SILAS. You're cryin'.

SUSAN. I'm n-n-not c-c-cryin'. Oh, boo, hoo, hoo.

SILAS. Honest, you are, Susan!

(*He crosses* R., *sits down beside her, and attempts to put his arm about her. She evades his caress, rises and goes* C.)

SUSAN (*hotly*). I am not crying, I tell you, and what is more, I'd never cry on your hateful old account, and you're a heartless deceiver, and I never did love you and I never will, and you've broken my poor little heart in two.

(*She starts to go* L., *but* SILAS *gets in her path.*)

SILAS. Ye ain't gonna leave me in anger, are you, Susan?

(*He attempts a caress, and* SUSAN *gives him a resounding slap on the cheek.*)

SUSAN. Out of my path, you vampire in breeches!

(SILAS *falls back, astounded, and rubs his cheek.* SUSAN *militantly marches past him and goes to door, meeting* YSOBEL, *who enters* L.)

YSOBEL. Not going, are you, dear? (SUSAN *pointedly ignores her, and exits through door,* R., *slamming it viciously.* YSOBEL *looks after her in amazement and then notices* SILAS, *who has come down* C., *still*

rubbing his cheek. She walks down to his right side.) What's consuming Susan?

SILAS (*brightening up at sound of* YSOBEL'S *voice*). She's jealous.

YSOBEL. Of who?

SILAS. Of you.

YSOBEL. Oh, I didn't know she was your sweetheart.

SILAS. She ain't.

YSOBEL. Then why ——?

SILAS. She was—you is.

YSOBEL. Oh, you great strong handsome man! I just know you're going to make me perfectly wild over you and throw me over for some new love!

SILAS. No sir—I mean, no ma'am. When I love a girl, I stick to her through thick and thin.

(YSOBEL *retreats up* R., *sits on couch, and invites* SILAS *with a coquettish shyness. When he sits beside her, she nestles her head on his shoulder, pulls his arm around her waist, and rubs his cheek softly* SILAS *is transported.*)

YSOBEL. Oh, you're so masterful.

SILAS. I allus was this way. (YSOBEL *gently draws* SILAS' *head down until his lips meet hers.*) Gosh, don't that taste good!

YSOBEL (*dreamily*). I just love diamonds.

SILAS (*aside*). I guess I better not go into this thing too goldarned deep.

YSOBEL. And I just adore an automobile!

SILAS (*brightening*). Me too! I got a Ford.

YSOBEL. I said automobiles.

SILAS. Yeh, I know. I said I got one.

YSOBEL. A Ford, I think you said.

SILAS. Aw, now you quit joshing. Tell you what I'll do—I'll go home, put on my Sunday clothes, and take you for a spin. Whadda ye say to that?

YSOBEL. Don't forget the gasoline. (*They rise.*)

SILAS. Well—good-bye.

YSOBEL. Hurry back.

SILAS. I will—won't be gone two minutes. Good-bye.

(*He shifts from one foot to the other in bashful embarrassment.*)

YSOBEL. Beat it, darling.

SILAS (*coyly*). Ain't you forgot nothin'?

YSOBEL. Not yet, but if you don't start away from here, I'm gonna forget that I'm a lady.

SILAS (*taken aback*). I'll—I'll be right back.

YSOBEL. Pump up all the tires.

SILAS. I will—good-bye.

YSOBEL. See that the radiator's full.

SILAS. I will—good-bye.

YSOBEL (*exasperated*). GOOD-BYE! (SILAS *hesitates a moment, then exit,* C., *murmuring weakly "good-bye."* YSOBEL *drops back to couch.*) And this is the gay, fashionable resort that my savings from the ribbon counter pay for. (*Looks off in direction taken by* SILAS.) Well, I hate to take Susan's beau, but I'm a young thing, and I've got to get something for my money. (*Enter* MA SWEET, R., *with a pan of potatoes, ignoring* YSOBEL. *She sits on chair down* R., *and starts peeling.* YSOBEL *rises and comes to* C.) Really, I must change to my motoring costume. (MA *grunts.*) When Mr. Sorghum returns with the motah, tell him I will be down in one teeny minute, and for him not to run off.

MA (*sourly*). You couldn't drive him off with a shotgun. (YSOBEL *laughs lightly and exit,* L. MA *vigorously peels potatoes in silence.* SUSAN *enters,* L., *comes down* L. *and sits listlessly.* MA *looks at her over the top of her glasses and keeps on peeling.* SUSAN *begins to weep silently.* MA *stands it as long as she can, and then gets up, places pan in the chair, and going to* SUSAN, *takes her in her arms.*) There, there, honey—don't you cry about a lazy good-for-nothing like Silas Sorghum.

SUSAN. He ain't no good-for-nothing, either,—that woman just naturally hypnotized the poor boy.

MA. And the " poor boy " lapped it up like a kitten laps up milk!

SUSAN. Oh, I'm so miserable. I wish I could die. I can't live without my Si!

MA. Well, in that case, I guess it's up to Mother. Now listen, honey, no city gal living can put it over your Ma, so don't you worry your little head. Your puddin'-headed lover will be back on the job before night.

SUSAN. Oh, if I could only believe it!

MA. Leave it to me.

SUSAN. Here comes Si in his machine.

MA. Yes, comin' to take Miss Le Claire out for a ride. You run and put them potatoes in the cabbage.

(SUSAN *goes* R., *picks up the pan and carries it to door* R.)

SUSAN. Oh, Mother, I'll never be happy without him.

MA. You'll never be happy with him, either, but run along, honey. Don't let him see you with them red eyes. (SUSAN *looks longingly off up* C., *and with a deep sigh exits through door,* R. *Sound of emergency brake being applied without. Enter* SILAS, C., *dressed in " store clothes," celluloid collar, patent four-in-hand tie on crooked, tan derby hat too small for him, and tan shoes, likewise too small, causing him to limp.* MA, *down* L.) Humph! All dressed up like a horse's neck!

SILAS. Where's Miss—uh—Miss—uh, Whatchumaycaller?

MA. Miss Whatchumaycaller is dressing. She said she'd be through in a minute. That was quarter of an hour ago, so she ought to be here in about fifteen minutes. You'd better sit down and take the load off your feet.

SILAS. Thank ye, ma'am. (*He sits on couch up* R.)

MA. I've got to make bread, so I'll ask you to amuse yourself.

SILAS. Yessum, thank you, ma'am. (*Exit* MA *at* R. SILAS *sits in painful silence. He removes his hat*

carefully, and lays it on the ground beside him; sighs, straightens his tie, runs his finger between his collar and neck, and sighs. Leans over and rubs his shoes and groans. He unfastens his shoes, and with a guilty look around the room eases them off his feet. He sighs a sigh of relief.) I generally wear tens, I can wear elevens, but these are twelves, and darned if they don't hurt.

(*He lies down on the couch and after a few seconds, he begins snoring.* MA *enters,* R., *with a sifter full of flour in her hands.*)

MA. Guess you might as well stay to supper ——
(*An especially hearty snore interrupts her, and she walks up* C., *then* R. C. *and stands beside the hammock and gazes thoughtfully at him.*) The Lord has certainly delivered you into my hands.

(*She looks around carefully to see if there is any one watching, and then sifts a quantity of flour on* SILAS' *face and feet, rubbing it gently with her hand.* YSOBEL *enters,* L. MA *hastily conceals the sifter behind her.*)

YSOBEL. Has Silas returned?

(MA, *up* C., *points to the couch.* YSOBEL *crosses* R. *to* SILAS. MA *comes down* L. *and slides the sifter under table or bench.* YSOBEL *starts back.*)

MA. What's ailing ye?
YSOBEL. Oh, Mrs. Sweet—he's pale as a sheet!

(MA *walks up* R. *to the couch.*)

MA. He does look sickly, don't he?
YSOBEL. Oh, and his feet are pale too!
MA. Good heavens! He's got the hoof and mouth disease!
YSOBEL. Why, I thought that was a cattle disease.
MA. It is; he must have caught it throwing the bull.

(*Comes down* R., *smiling.* SILAS *stretches his arms,*

yawns and sits up. When he sees YSOBEL, *his face breaks into a ghastly grin.*)

SILAS. Gee, I musta fell asleep. (*He gets up and takes a step toward* YSOBEL, *who screams in fright and retreats up* L.) What's the matter?

YSOBEL. Don't you come near me.

SILAS. Gee, you ain't angry 'cause I took a little cat nap, is ye? (*He tries to take her hand, and she runs down* L. *He comes down* R. *and looks at* MA *in perplexity.*) What's the matter, Mrs. Sweet?

(MA *draws him aside and says in a confidential tone.*)

MA. That's the way all women behave when they love a man. She wants you to make out like you're wild about her and pursue her.

SILAS. Is that it?

MA. The wilder you pursue, the more she'll love you.

(SILAS *fixes on* YSOBEL *a baleful glare and shakes his fist at her.*)

SILAS (*dramatically*). You think to escape me, me proud beauty, but I'm a desperate man, and you shall be mine. (*He turns to* MA.) How's that?

MA. Fine! Now pursue her.

(SILAS *goes after* YSOBEL *in firm, heavy strides, and she runs around table or bench, then up* R. *and around couch.*)

YSOBEL (*screaming*). Help! Help! Help! (SILAS *quickens his pace and follows her, growling in what he believes to be an effective display of passion. Around and around they go—faster and faster.* SILAS *finally falls over the couch and while he is picking himself up* YSOBEL *runs to* MA, *down* R., *for protection.* SILAS *comes down* R. C.) Don't you dare touch me, you long, gawky country bumpkin. I hate you worse than a snake. I never did like you. I was just playing with you to pass the time, but I'm going to leave here on the next train, and if you so much as look at me from now until train time, I'll have you

shot. (SILAS *falls back.*) Take my advice and stick to your country girl. Believe me, if she ever sees a real guy, you'll lose her.

(*Takes a step toward him. He falls back still further. She sweeps past him, and goes to door* L.)

SILAS (*following*). Aw! Ysobel!

YSOBEL. Shut up.

(*Exit,* L.)

MA. I do love those gentle dispositions.

(SUSAN *enters* R. *and comes to* C.)

SILAS. I never did like her from the first moment I laid eyes on her.

MA. What?

SILAS. No, ma'am. I mistrusted her from the first. (*Goes to* SUSAN, C.) Besides, I love Susan so much that no knife can cut our love in two, can it, Susan? (SUSAN *looks at her mother in wonder.*)

MA. Ma has delivered the goods as per agreement.

SUSAN. But how? Oh, Si, what in the world have you got on your face?

(*She wipes flour off his face with her apron.*)

SILAS. Well, whadda ye know about that?

MA. I'll never tell you.

SILAS. Let's get married, Susan!

SUSAN. Oh, Si! Are you sure you won't love no one else but me?

SILAS. You betchuh!

MA (*aside*). Not while I'm on the job, he won't.

SUSAN SILAS
MA

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